



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE KENSINGTON RUNE STONE

LAURENCE M. LARSON

The literature on the subject of the Kensington Rune Stone has already grown to fairly respectable proportions; and it seems almost a waste of effort to continue a discussion that perhaps should have closed ten years ago. But in two recent issues of the *Wisconsin Magazine of History* (December, 1919, and March, 1920) Mr. H. R. Holand returns to the subject and develops an argument for the genuineness of the inscription which is so remarkable in its use of historical materials that it should not be allowed to pass without comment.

Reduced to the form of an outline, Mr. Holand's argument runs about as follows. In 1342 Ivar Bardsen, who had come from Norway to Greenland the year before, was sent with an expedition to assist the colonists in the Western Settlement in their conflict with the Eskimos. Ivar and his men found the settlement deserted, the inhabitants having emigrated to America. This emigration resulted in the renewal of trade relations between the Greenland colony and the American mainland. Five years subsequent to this migration a vessel that was returning from Markland (Labrador?) was driven by storms to an Icelandic port. The following year this same ship sailed on to Norway where its arrival created a real sensation. The Norwegian king now made the Greenland trade a royal monopoly and developed a new line of colonial policy. He was not able to realize his new plans immediately because of the Black Death; but seven years later (1355) he sent Paul Knutson to Greenland to help the colonists maintain the Christian faith. However, the king's chief concern was not for the Christians of the Eastern Settlement, but for those who had abandoned the faith and emigrated to America. Paul Knutson, who remained abroad for eight or nine years, must have

spent part of the time in Vinland. From the Vinland settlement he sent an expedition northward along the coast, which after a time reached the western shore of Hudson Bay. Leaving ten men to guard the ship, the other members of the party rowed up the Nelson River and after several weeks of wandering reached a point in northwestern Minnesota where ten of their number were slain by the Indians. The survivors traveled some eighty miles farther south, recorded their troubles on a rune stone, and were lost to history.

Here we have a series of a dozen or more important facts (at least they are presented as facts) stretching in a long chain from Bergen, Norway, to Kensington, Minnesota.

The materials used in Mr. Holand's articles are of three kinds: (1) reliable data culled from old Norwegian and Old Icelandic sources, which carry his narrative from Bergen to Greenland; (2) a series of conjectures and inferences which continue the narrative from Greenland to Minnesota; (3) details from the Kensington Rune Stone.

It is quite correct that Ivar Bardsen visited the Western Settlement and found it deserted. But neither he nor any other writer for several hundred years appears to have known that the settlers had emigrated to America. The Icelandic churchman who wrote annals "from memory" in the seventeenth century states that they abandoned the true faith and *ad Americae populos se converterunt*. It is clear that the word *Americae* could not have appeared in the original source; that is the bishop's own contribution. But more important is the fact that the bishop does not state that the settlers emigrated; what he evidently intended to say is that they adopted the mode of living of the American people, or, more correctly, of the Eskimos.

It may be regarded as certain that the Greenlanders occasionally visited the forests of Labrador. Two of the older Icelandic annals report the arrival of a ship from Markland in 1347. On that point Mr. Holand is on solid ground. Un-

fortunately he cites no authority for the statement that this same ship sailed on to Norway the following year. His remark that Jon Guttormson was a passenger on this journey leads to the conclusion that his source of information may be an entry in the Gottskalk Annals for the year 1348: "departure of Jon Guttormson and the Greenlanders." It is to be noted, however, that this does not state that Jon sailed in a Greenland ship but that he traveled with Greenlanders.

Even if the ship that carried Jon and his fellow travelers had actually come from Greenland, the chances are that it was not the craft that came from Markland. The Skalholt annalist describes this as a very small ship, "smaller in size than small Iceland boats." Furthermore, it was evidently on its way back to Greenland when it was driven to port in Iceland. Ships were plentiful in Iceland in 1348: the Flat-isle Annals note the fact that thirteen Norwegian ships had arrived the year before and that twenty-one spent the winter in Icelandic harbors.

The emigration of the Greenlanders in 1342 and the arrival in Bergen of the adventurers from Markland in 1348 are necessary links in Mr. Holand's argument. These events, he believes, led to an important change in the colonial policy of the Norwegian king. But in the present state of the evidence we shall have to regard both events as probably mythical. In addition Mr. Holand has built up a third myth around the person of a Norwegian official, Paul Knutson.

Paul Knutson was sent to Greenland in 1355, as the author correctly states. So far as we know the object of his journey was Greenland alone; no other country is mentioned in the letter of his appointment. But Mr. Holand believes it "inconceivable that such a man of affairs should linger year after year in the dreary little colony of Greenland." We do not know whether Paul Knutson lingered or not, as

we do not have the date of his return; but, if he did, it may have been because he found it difficult to get back to Norway. Greenland has no iron and no native timber that can be used in ship building; consequently seaworthy ships were few in the settlement. Moreover, after 1348, when the Greenland trade became a royal monopoly, independent sailing between Greenland and Norway must have ceased. A royal merchant ship was due to sail each year to the colony; but the Greenland shore is difficult to approach; wrecks were frequent in Baffin Bay; and sometimes years would pass without a visit from the other world.

We need not stress this point, however, as there surely was work to do in Greenland in the troubled years following the destruction of the lesser settlement in 1342. Paul Knutson was sent to the Arctic to assist in maintaining the faith—in other words, to fight the Eskimos. Very little is known of conditions in Greenland during the second half of the fourteenth century, but such information as we do have indicates that the heathen neighbors had become quite troublesome.

It is scarcely necessary to discuss the hypothetical expedition into Hudson Bay and up the Nelson River, as Mr. Holand frankly admits that for this part of his argument he has no documentary evidence. But in his second article (March, 1920) he comes forward with the claim that he has discovered the two skerries referred to in the Kensington inscription.¹ If this claim is substantial, the fact is one of real importance.

The identification of the skerries rests on the supposition that a day's journey in Old Norse times was approximately eighty miles. Professor Hovgaard has shown quite conclu-

¹ This argument, however, would be more convincing if skerries were less plentiful in western Minnesota landscapes. In 1909, when he was interpreting "day's journey" as twenty-five miles, Mr. Holand found two points of land in Pelican Lake and wrote of them: "Here clearly enough were the two skerries mentioned in the runestone, and here under our feet lay the point on which these first white discoverers in the west lost their lives." *Skandinaven* (Chicago), Nov. 29, 1909. J. S.

sively that this estimate is correct in navigation; but the writer knows of no one earlier than Mr. Holand who has argued that the same term with the same meaning was used for measuring distances on land. Eighty miles is a long day's journey in western Minnesota. Therefore, unless it can be shown that the medieval Norsemen actually estimated distances on land in this way, we shall have to doubt the identification of the skerries.

The larger question, whether the Kensington inscription is a genuine document or a clever forgery, the writer does not regard himself qualified to discuss. In 1910 the Illinois Historical Society published a report on this problem prepared by Professor G. T. Flom, which, so far as the writer is informed, still remains the most complete discussion of the question on the linguistic side. Professor Flom's conclusion was that the inscription is of recent date. Until some competent scholar, one who knows runes and Northern dialects, shall decide otherwise, this conclusion is likely to stand.²

It may be said in passing, however, that some of the objections urged against the authenticity of the inscription are of doubtful strength. In the June issue of the *Wisconsin Magazine of History* Mr. R. B. Anderson condemns the document on three counts: (1) it is written in runes; (2) it contains the modern word "opdagelse"; (3) the word "risa," which also occurs in the inscription, is a "word of recent importation in Scandinavia."

Mr. Anderson is probably correct in stating that "opdagelse," meaning discovery, "had not yet been incorporated into any Scandinavian tongue"; but he is surely in error on the other two points. Runes were freely used in the Northern countries] much later than 1362. Professor Flom, in his discussion of the Kensington inscription, prints a runic alphabet that was used for literary purposes in Sweden early

² Professor Larson was a member of the committee before which Professor Flom argued his report, and he coincided with the decision reached. J. S.

in the fifteenth century. It is also clear that "reisa," a noun meaning journey (and the Kensington rune-master uses the noun form only), had found a place in the Northern languages some time before 1362. Fritzner, in his old Norse dictionary, notes the occurrence of the word in a Norwegian document dated as early as 1344.

In conclusion the writer wishes to protest against Mr. Anderson's attempt to impute the guilt of forgery to the men who first brought the rune stone to light. It is, of course, quite possible that Mr. Ohman and his two associates devised the inscription and planted the stone; but the burden of proof rests with the one who prefers the charge, and Mr. Anderson makes no serious effort to prove his case.³ He calls attention to certain circumstances of a decidedly suspicious nature; but without further support these cannot be regarded as evidence.

COMMENT BY H. R. HOLAND ON ALL OF MR. LARSON'S ARTICLE EXCEPT THE LAST THREE PARAGRAPHS

My reply to Professor Larson's criticisms is as follows:

1. We have the statement of Bishop Gisle Oddson, who in 1637 transcribed an excerpt from some annals now lost, as follows: "The people of Greenland (the Western Settlement) in 1342 voluntarily gave up the Christian faith and cast their lot with the people of America" (ad Americae populos se converterunt)¹. This emigration is attested to by an eye witness, the priest Ivar Bardsen, who in 1342 visited the Western Settlement immediately

³ In fairness to these three men it should be stated that at the time Mr. Anderson published his suspicions, May, 1910, the two survivors A. Anderson and O. Ohman both wrote letters vigorously denying that they had anything to do with the matter. See *Norwegian-American*, Northfield, Minn. June 10, 1910. J. S.

¹ Recent writers are generally agreed in rejecting this interpretation. Gustav Storm published an analysis of Bishop Gisle's annals in 1890 and showed that as an independent work they have practically no value. (*Arkiv for nordisk Filologi*, VI.) See also Nansen, *In Northern Mists*, II, 101ff.; and A. A. Björnbo, *Cartographia Groenlandica*, 11 (*Meddelelser om Gronland*, XLVIII, 1911). L. M. L. Storm's remark concerning Bishop Oddson's "hypothesis" is pure guesswork. H. R. H.